

VIII. PLACEMENT SERVICES

Placement completes the Job Corps model of providing comprehensive services to disadvantaged young men and women. These services are designed to help Job Corps students obtain and maintain employment--preferably in their chosen vocation--that will lead to economic self-sufficiency and enhance their own, as well as their families', well-being. To assist students in the transition from Job Corps to gainful employment in their communities, Job Corps provides two sets of placement services. The first is designed to assist students either in obtaining a job that will lead to advancement or in pursuing additional education and training to meet the entry requirements for higher-skilled jobs. The second set of services is designed to help students make the transition into a community by assisting them in relocation efforts and referring them to community support services.

To focus its placement services on the types of employment or additional education/training that will help ensure the economic self-sufficiency of its students, Job Corps has adopted a set of criteria for determining what constitutes a successful placement--specifically, a student's entry into at least one of the following:

- Paid employment of at least 20 hours per week, with 32 hours or more constituting a full-time job placement
- An approved apprenticeship training program
- Active duty in the armed forces
- A full-time education or training program, defined as 20 hours per week for high school or vocational educational programs and 9 credit hours for college
- A combination of paid employment and college, with 16 hours of employment and 6 hours of college constituting full-time placement and 10 hours of employment and 6 hours of college constituting part-time placement

Although these criteria allow for both full-time and part-time placements, they require former students to be engaged in productive activities on more than a half-time basis and limit part-time jobs or part-time education and training programs as valid placements. In addition, as described in Chapter IX, Job Corps emphasizes the importance of full-time placement and of placement in jobs that are related to students' chosen vocation by including both outcomes as measures. Although a training-related placement--referred to as a job-training match--is not required, this type of placement plays an important role in assessment of specific vocational areas offered in Job Corps, as well as of the program's overall performance.

This chapter describes the organization and provision of Job Corps' placement services. The first section provides an overview of the delivery of these services and the organizations that assist students in obtaining a job and establishing themselves in the community. This is followed by a discussion of the services available to students to help them find and obtain gainful employment. The third section discusses the second set of placement services and the roles of the national support contractors who provide the services to help former Job Corps students make the transition into their chosen communities. The final section highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the Job Corps placement services and presents several of the main lessons learned from our study of this component of the Job Corps model.

Before describing Job Corps' placement services, we must emphasize the limited nature of the information available for the process analysis. The findings presented in this chapter are derived principally from telephone interviews with management staff from the organizations that provide placement services to students who attended one of the 23 centers selected for our in-depth site visits. As described in Appendix A, a placement agency was selected for each of the 23 centers we visited, and we interviewed the person who was most knowledgeable about the placement services

provided to students attending the linked center. Information regarding the provision of placement services designed to help students make the transition from center life back to their communities was obtained during our site visits to Job Corps regional offices from representatives of the organizations providing these services. Overall, the findings discussed here are based on a limited set of data and do not allow for the same degree of comprehensive examination that was possible for OA activities and center operations. As such, the findings presented in this chapter should be interpreted as a general overview of Job Corps placement activities.

A. ORGANIZATION OF PLACEMENT SERVICES

Three types of organizations provide placement services for Job Corps students: Job Corps centers, placement contractors, and national support services contractors. Job Corps centers provide both types of placement services for students while they are still enrolled in the program and attending a center. Post-termination placement services are provided primarily by placement contractors and national support services contractors. However, centers often continue to provide assistance to former students after they terminate from the program through informal contact between center staff and former students.

In addition to providing students the vocational, academic, and social skills necessary to succeed in the labor market, Job Corps centers have historically played a role in helping students get a job once they leave the program. As described below, centers help prepare students to look for a job and either return to their home community or move to a new one. While centers have a long history of providing these types of services, they have recently begun to play a much larger role in helping secure jobs for former students. Because of changes in the performance measurement system, centers are taking a heightened interest in the placement of students once they leave the center. Over

the past several years, the measures used to judge how well a center is operating have shifted toward placement outcomes and away from students' in-program experiences.

Today, a variety of center staff help prepare students to find a job and make a smooth transition into a community, whereas up until several years ago, only a few center staff were involved in providing placement assistance. Traditionally, the exit World of Work instructor and the Work Experience Program (WEP) coordinator (if the center had this position) were the main providers of placement services, although vocational instructors in some centers also assisted. However, the recent emphasis on placement in the outcome measurement system has caused many centers to incorporate placement outcomes in the evaluation of all vocational instructors and other center staff. As a result, a much broader range of center staff are focusing on helping students find and maintain jobs.

Placement contractors are assigned the primary responsibility for providing job placement services to former Job Corps students. As described in Chapter II, there are three major categories of placement contractors: (1) Job Corps centers that hold separately awarded competitive contracts, (2) other private organizations, and (3) State Employment Services Agencies (SESAs) or other state agencies. These contractors provide a broad range of services to assist students in obtaining a job and shoulder the responsibility for verifying that a student's employment and educational activities meet the criteria that determine a valid placement. Placement contractors must provide these services to all former Job Corps students, regardless of the amount of time they were enrolled in the program or whether they completed any aspect of the program, for a period of six months from the date students terminate their enrollment at a center.¹

¹Placement contractors are not required to provide assistance to students who were terminated for violating the expanded zero-tolerance policy or to students with fraudulent enrollments (students who were determined to be ineligible for the program after enrollment).

Job Corps placement contracts are awarded to provide placement services to former students residing in specified geographic areas, which in general encompass an entire state. However, several placement contracts are awarded to provide placement services in smaller geographic areas (such as a metropolitan area), and a small number cover multistate areas. For example, virtually all the placement contracts held by SESAs or other state agencies cover an entire state, while most of the placement contracts awarded to a Job Corps center cover smaller geographic regions. In contrast, the contracts held by other private organizations include contracts that encompass small geographic areas through multistate areas for an entire Job Corps region.

This geographic basis for awarding placement contracts leads to different types of contractors with different operational practices. Contractors who serve students living in a single metropolitan area generally do so from a single office with a very small number of staff. For example, the center-affiliated contractors included in our linked sample of placement contractors typically had fewer than 10 staff and between one and four office locations. Further, the placement activities of these center-based contractors were often run from an office at the center, with the same staff providing both on-center placement services to students while they are enrolled and post-termination placement assistance to students who live in the geographic area covered by the contract. Moreover, these contracts are usually managed by an on-center manager who oversees all placement services at the center and often provides placement services.

In contrast to the generally localized activities of center-affiliated placement contractors, contractors that provide services to former students over an entire state typically have multiple offices located throughout that state. For instance, one of the managers of a contract held by a SESA reported that the agency had 36 offices throughout the state. These contractors also generally have a central administrative office that oversees all operations and contract managers who rarely provide

services to former students. In addition, placement staff employed by SESAs or other state agencies often have responsibilities other than providing services to former Job Corps students. Staff working for other private placement contractors can focus all their attention on Job Corps activities.² However, staff employed by SESAs or other state agencies also provide services to a broad range of clients and these agencies rarely have staff devoted exclusively to the provision of services to Job Corps students.

The third type of placement service providers are two national support services contractors who hold sole-source contracts with the National Office of Job Corps to provide support services to former Job Corps students. Specifically, two nonprofit organizations, Women in Community Service (WICS) and Joint Action in Community Service (JACS), provide both pre-termination and post-termination support. The services WICS and JACS provide are designed to help students make a smooth transition into the communities where they are going after they leave Job Corps and to facilitate their abilities to obtain and maintain a job. While students are still enrolled in Job Corps, these organizations provide information about the communities students have chosen to locate in and the types of social services available in these communities. After students have left the center, WICS and JACS attempt to contact them to determine the support services they need to be able to succeed in the labor market and to refer them to community service providers.

Although these support services contracts are awarded at a national level, services of both WICS and JACS are separated along the same geographic divisions as the Job Corps regional offices. Both of these community service organizations have staff at each of the regional offices, as well as a large number of volunteers in communities throughout the nation. The WICS and JACS staff located in

²Although many of these placement contractors also hold OA contracts, only a small number have the same staff perform both OA and placement functions. In most of these situations, the OA and placement functions are performed by separate staff under a common management structure.

the regional offices primarily refer former students to local service providers and, when appropriate, will have a local representative contact the student to provide additional assistance.

This organizational structure for the provision of placement services results in students receiving placement assistance from several different entities. First, students receive assistance from the Job Corps center they attend. They are then assigned to a placement contractor based on the location of the community they have chosen to live in upon leaving the center, most likely a different organization that will be serving former students of a number of different Job Corps centers. If, within the six-month period in which services must be offered, a student relocates outside the geographic area covered by the original contractor, a new placement contractor is assigned. Finally, female students may receive referrals to support services and other assistance from a WICS representative, and male students may receive similar assistance from a JACS representative located in the regional office or possibly in their communities.

Another key feature of this organizational structure for the delivery of placement services relates to the geographic location of students relative to the organizations providing the services. Clearly, while students are enrolled, they are living very close to or even at the service provider. However, unless students decide to locate near the center they attended, they may be quite a distance from the center staff who would be assisting them in trying to find a job and move into their communities. Moreover, the large geographic areas covered by most placement contractors may also result in students being geographically quite distant from the assigned placement specialist. As a result, once students leave a center, they will most likely never have face-to-face contact with placement staff.

B. JOB PLACEMENT SERVICES

Services designed to help students obtain and maintain gainful employment are provided by both Job Corps centers and placement contractors. This section describes such services, first with an

overview of the services provided by centers, and then with a discussion of those provided by placement contractors.

1. Center-Provided Job Placement Services

Centers conduct a number of activities to prepare students for leaving the center and entering the labor market. The vast majority of these activities are focused on developing general employability skills and preparing for job interviews. For example, the exit part of the World of Work component in the educational program assists students in preparing a resume. In addition, to prepare students for the labor market, centers instruct them in how to prepare for and act in a job interview.

At some centers, placement activities begin several months before students are expected to complete the program, while in others the center's placement efforts are concentrated in the last few weeks of students' enrollments. For example, some centers begin preparing students for the labor market long before they are expected to complete the program by using the (P/PEP) process to mimic job interviews. Specifically, as students are about halfway toward completing their vocational program, the center begins to treat the P/PEP as a mock job interview. Students are expected to wear clothes appropriate for a job interview, and the counselor leading the session treats the student as a job applicant. In these centers, the P/PEP is treated more and more like a job interview as the student nears completion of the program. WEP placements also serve the important function of preparing students for the labor market. All centers use the exit phase of World of Work during a student's last few days on center to focus the student on getting a job.

As noted above, centers are becoming more focused on the placements of their students as the outcome measurement system places more emphasis on job placement and wage measures. Part of this heightened attention has taken the form of centers working to provide direct job placements for

students. For instance, centers are increasingly asking their vocational instructors to assist in placing students in jobs through their contacts with business and labor organizations. Moreover, Job Corps' recent emphasis on School-to-Work transitions also attempts to develop permanent jobs for students after they complete the program.

The final role of centers in providing placement assistance for their students involves interaction with placement contractors. As they terminate from the program, students are informed how to contact the placement agency that has been assigned to them. In addition, the center also provides information about the student to the placement contractor through paper forms and, at times, personal contact between vocational instructors and placement specialists. Finally, the center informs students that they must obtain their last readjustment check and any final bonus checks from the placement agency.

2. Contractor-Provided Job Placement Services

Placement contractors also provide services to students both while they are enrolled in the program and after they leave a center. There is a great deal of overlap in the activities of centers and placement contractors in the provision of services to help prepare students to obtain a job, particularly while students are still enrolled at a center. Moreover, the lines where a center's role in placement ends and where the placement contractors role begins are very ambiguous among the centers that also hold a placement contract.

While it is unclear whether the provision of placement services to students prior to their termination is part of the center's activities or the placement contractor's activities in the centers that hold a placement contract, most placement contractors not affiliated with a center also provide some form of placement services to students while they are enrolled in the program. All the placement managers interviewed, regardless of their affiliation with a center, believed that it was beneficial to

begin emphasizing the importance of placement to students as early as possible. For example, in the words of a manager from a private placement contractor: “We make ourselves and the idea of placement as visible and accessible as possible from day one.... Placement is as much a part of the program as academic and vocational classes.”

Despite this universal opinion of placement contract managers, there is substantial variation in the extent to which they provide pre-termination services to students. At one end of the spectrum are placement contractors who assign a staff member to be located at the center. For example, while it is more common for center-affiliated placement contractors to have staff at the center, a number of contractors not affiliated with a center set up an on-center office for staff responsible for assisting students who locate in the surrounding area. At the other end of the spectrum are a minority of placement contractors that rarely or never send staff even to visit a center, much less provide pre-termination services to students. In these cases, the only contact the placement contractor has with students prior to their termination is through a letter that provides the student with the address and telephone number of the office of the placement contractor nearest to where the student will be living.

On-center placement contractors that provide services to students prior to their termination focus on three placement-related activities:

1. Making students aware of the placement services available to them after they leave the program
2. Pre-employment counseling
3. Job search assistance

The first activity begins during the orientation program, with the placement staff describing the range of placement services available to students. The other two on-center services placement contractors

provide to enrolled students occur during the weeks immediately before students terminate from the center. The involvement of placement staff in these activities was much higher if the placement contractor also operated the center. For example, when the same contractor was used for center operations and placement services, the contractor's center and placement staff often coordinated the exit World of Work phase. Moreover, in these instances, placement staff were also more likely to assist the center's WEP coordinator in finding work experience sites for students because of their knowledge and contacts with local employers. Overall, on-center placement contractor activity served more as an important bridge to post-termination services than as a "placement service" in its own right.

Placement contractors' primary responsibilities for providing services to students begins upon termination from a center. Placement contractors are required to provide all former Job Corps students with a broad range of post-termination services, including:

- Locating recent terminees and notifying them of the available placement services they are entitled to receive
- Providing job search assistance services, such as help in developing interviewing skills, instruction in locating and using job information sources, help preparing a resume, and maintaining a job bank
- Providing former students with assistance in job development and with direct job referrals
- Assisting former students with enrolling in further education or training programs or with enlisting in the military
- Verifying placements and submitting placement data to the Job Corps Data Center

Up until the past few years, placement contractors had to provide these services to former students only until they were placed in a job, school, or the military or for six months after termination from

a center. A policy change that went into effect in program year (FY) 1996 now requires contractors to provide the full range of services to former students throughout the entire six-month period, regardless of when students were initially placed.

The first post-termination activity of placement contractors involves locating former students and informing them about the placement services they are entitled to receive. Although the center informs the students prior to their termination of the name, address, and telephone number of the placement contractor, and although the placement contractor may have had some contact with students while they were at a center, locating former students requires substantial effort. Although Job Corps policies provide former students with incentives to contact their assigned placement contractor, managers estimated that less than one out of four former students contact the contractor.³ Hence, placement staff must locate and initiate contact with the great majority of former students.

To help the placement contractor locate former students, centers request information from terminating students regarding how to contact them, and the centers provide this information to the placement contractor within a few days after students terminate. Despite the best efforts of the centers to obtain reliable and up-to-date contact information, most of the managers we interviewed mentioned the poor quality of this information. Although the placement contract managers recognized that former students are a highly mobile population, a number of them suggested that, in addition to asking students for contact information, centers should also obtain updated information for relatives or friends of students who would know how to reach them. Recently, in response to inclusion of a post-placement follow-up measure in the outcomes measurement system, centers are

³To provide an incentive to former students, Job Corps requires them to obtain their last readjustment check from their assigned placement contractor. To receive their final check, students must contact the placement contractor and provide them with current contact information. Moreover, as an added incentive, students can also receive a bonus payment through the contractor by obtaining and reporting a training-related placement.

becoming more actively involved in obtaining student contact information and in helping track students.

Overall, placement managers estimated that one-half to three-fourths of placement specialists' time is devoted solely to locating students and keeping in contact with them over the six-month placement period. Placement contractors rely almost exclusively on telephone calls and letters mailed to students' last known address. Very few students are contacted in person, and almost all interaction between students and placement specialists is over the telephone. The extensive amount of time required just to initiate and maintain contact with former students, as well as the heavy reliance on telephone interactions, clearly limits the ability of contractors to provide in-depth placement services.

Within the limited time available, and constrained by their reliance on telephone interactions with students, placement contractors make available a variety of placement services. Table VIII.1 shows the types of services that are offered by the 19 contractors we interviewed and the managers' perceptions about the extent to which former students use each type of service. The first column in the table lists the types of placement services contractors offer, and the second column shows the number of placement contractors that offer each type of service. The last set of columns present the number of managers who reported that the corresponding service was provided to all students, to most students, to about one-half of the students, and to only a few students.

The results in Table VIII.1 indicate that all 19 of the contractors interviewed provided former students with job search skills, interview skills, and direct job referrals. Almost all offer some type of career counseling, assistance in enrolling in further education or training programs or enlistment in the military, and assistance in preparing a resume. Most of the contractors provided a job bank

TABLE VIII.1
SUMMARY OF POST-TERMINATION SERVICES OFFERED
BY PLACEMENT CONTRACTORS

Placement Services	Number Who Offer Service	Number Reporting Portion of Students Using Service			
		All	Most	About Half	A Few
Job Search Assistance	19	4	5	5	5
Interview Skills	19	3	6	5	5
Direct Job Referral	19	2	6	6	4
Career Counseling	18	5	4	3	5
Assistance in Training/College Enrollment	18	0	2	4	11
Resume-Writing Assistance	18	2	3	3	10
Job Club/Job Bank	15	4	1	5	5
Support Services	13	0	0	1	12
Aptitude/Skills Assessment	8	3	1	0	4

SOURCE: Interviews with placement contractors linked with centers at which site visits were conducted.

for former students and referrals to other support services. Very few provided aptitude and skills assessments.

Placement managers reported job search assistance to be among the most widely used services agencies offer. These services involved primarily talking with former students over the telephone about ways of locating and using common sources of job listings, such as newspaper classified ads, SESAs, and corporate job information sources. In the vast majority of placement operations, this assistance was informal and was incorporated into conversations between placement specialists and students. However, in a few instances, managers reported providing students with pamphlets or other informational materials to use on their own.

Another service that managers reported most or all students received involves job interviewing skills. Over half the managers we interviewed gave this service particular emphasis. Usually, the placement specialist provided students with information on how to dress, how to present their training and skills, and how to interact appropriately with the interviewer. In addition, most contractors emphasized the use of practice or “mock” interviews as an important strategy for developing student skills in this area. However, these mock interviews were almost always conducted over the phone. Another instructional tool, which is used by a small number of the contractors we interviewed, involved contacting employers students had already interviewed with and providing feedback from these employers to students as a training device.

Direct job development and placement is the other primary service that placement agencies are contracted to provide and, as shown in Table VIII.1, all the managers we interviewed indicated that they provided this service. Managers reported that placement specialists identify existing job openings, match student qualifications to the job requirements, and then refer students for an interview. While placement specialists used a range of job development strategies, including

newspaper ads, employer announcements, and job databases, direct contact with employers where students had been placed in the past was identified as the most productive strategy.

Most of the managers we interviewed identified job development efforts as the most important component of the services they provide to former students, and almost all placement contractors devoted at least some resources to direct referral services. However, managers reported that their staff is unable to devote enough time to this activity and that more effort on direct job development would benefit students who might otherwise not obtain a job that best matches the skills and competencies they gained from Job Corps. For example, after spending up to three-fourths of their time locating and checking in with students, placement specialists were reported not to have adequate time to develop good relations with employers, which managers identified as key to affecting positive placements.

All but one of the placement managers we interviewed reported providing career counseling designed to clarify the student's career and employment goals and providing information for developing a realistic placement goal. Examples of counseling activities included exploring current employment options, reviewing any additional training and educational options (especially with younger students), providing specific labor market information (occupational pay scales), and providing information about requirements for entering the military. As with the other placement services, placement specialists used primarily informal counseling methods in telephone conversations with former students.

The remaining services--assistance in enrolling in further school/training or enlisting in the armed forces, resume preparation, job bank, support services, and aptitude/skills assessments--are frequently offered, but used only sporadically at best. For example, managers noted that students had already received substantial assistance in the first two services before termination, because the

center provided them this assistance. Although most placement offices maintain an internal job bank that includes job listings and other job reference materials, students rarely visit the placement office to use this resource. Placement contractors also mentioned that they play a minor role in providing other support services to former students.

As noted above, placement contractors are now responsible for students not just until they are initially placed but for the entire six-month period after their termination date. After their initial placements, students may still require assistance from contractors to remain on the job or locate another placement if the first one does not prove satisfactory. In order to stay informed about recently placed students, all contractors implemented some kind of followup during the first weeks or months after initial placement. The nature and extent of these follow-up activities varied considerably across contractors. For example, several contractors called each student regularly (at least once a month) for up to six months, while others relied on follow-up contact with employers to track students' success on the job. Still others had no personal contact with the student after placement, relying solely on either a follow-up form letter or the local JACS or WICS representatives to establish contact with students who might need additional services.

The discussion above presents a picture of Job Corps' post-termination placement services from the perspective of our sample of 19 placement contractor managers. To obtain a different--and more representative--perspective on these placement services, we also examined the placement experiences of terminees during calendar year 1996. Table VIII.2 summarizes the placement experiences of these former Job Corps students. The table categorizes placement agencies into three groups--SESAs or other state agencies, placement contractors affiliated with a Job Corps center, and other private placement contractors--and presents results overall and for each of these three groups. The specific measures examined in the table are the percentage of terminees assigned to each

TABLE VIII.2
SUMMARY OF STUDENT PLACEMENT EXPERIENCES
(Calendar Year 1996 Terminees)

	Overall	SESAs	Center Affiliated	Other Private Contractor
Percentage of Students Assigned	100	12	32	56
Percentage of Students Assigned Who Are Placed	82	74	85	81
Percentage of Students Placed Who Are Self-Placed	48	39	47	50

SOURCE: SPAMIS.

contractor type; the percentage of these terminees placed in a job, school, or the military; and among those placed, the percentage who are reported by the placement contractor as being self-placed.⁴

The findings reported in the first row of Table VIII.2 illustrate some of the differences mentioned above in the size of the different categories of placement agencies. Specifically, although center-affiliated placement contractors hold 45 percent of the placement contracts (Table II.3), these agencies are rather small and are assigned only 32 percent of students for placement purposes. On the other hand, other private placement contractors are assigned 56 percent of the students but hold only 41 percent of the placement contracts. As noted above, these agencies generally have more staff and multiple offices spread over a large geographic area.

Comparing the results in the last two rows suggests that, while almost four out of five students are placed in a job, school, or the military, a substantial number of these placements are not the direct result of placement contractors' efforts. Overall, almost half of all reported placements are recorded as self-placements; that is, the student found the placement without help from the contractor. Clearly, the reports of self-placements are not likely to be very reliable; while placement contractors are not formally assessed on the percentage of self-placements, it is not in their interest to report higher self-placements than actually occur. For example, the reported self-placement rate among SESA placement contractors dropped from 54 percent in calendar year 1995 to the 39 percent reported in Table VIII.2, suggesting that the reporting in this area is at the discretion of the placement contractor. Although the reliability of the reported self-placement data is questionable, these results reinforce the perceptions of the contractor managers that placement staff expend most of their efforts in locating students and completing paperwork rather than assisting students in securing a placement.

⁴A placement contractor reports a student as self-placed if, in the opinion of the contractor, the student obtained the placement without the assistance of the contractor.

C. OTHER PLACEMENT SERVICES

Although Job Corps centers also provide services to ease students' transition back into their communities or into new communities, the primary responsibility for these services is assigned to the two national support services contractors, WICS and JACS. These contractors use a corps of community volunteers who act as general counselors to deliver local support services. WICS, which serves female students, and JACS, which serves male students, provide both pre-termination and post-termination support services to students. These services are designed to help students make the transition into the communities where they are going after they leave Job Corps and to help them obtain and maintain a job.

Centers provide exiting students with information about the general support services in their communities, including the services available through WICS and JACS and, if available, the names of the WICS or JACS volunteers available to assist them. Whenever possible, they try to get the students in contact with the assigned WICS or JACS volunteer before termination. Centers also provide referrals to other community service organizations in the areas students are going to, and many centers will continue to provide informal help to former students who contact the center to ask for assistance or referrals to other service providers.

WICS and JACS attempt to telephone students within a few days after they have arrived in the local area and to ask whether they would like to speak to a volunteer. These two organizations provide information about the communities students have chosen to locate in and the types of social services that are available. In addition, the WICS and JACS staff or volunteers will assess students' needs for post-termination support services, provide counseling services, provide referrals to appropriate community service providers, assist in preventing early termination, and follow up on students who have left the center without authorization.

The JACS and WICS counselors also provide former students with information about placement bonuses and refer them to the local placement agency. Because former students might need immediate help with housing or other social services when they arrive at their destination, they sometimes first come into contact with the JACS or WICS volunteer rather than their assigned placement contractor. For example, several placement contractor managers mentioned linkages with WICS and JACS as important in obtaining updated information on how to contact students. These volunteers are in a position not only to refer students for placement services, but also to encourage them to follow through on placement activities.

WICS and JACS volunteers may provide information or advice on a variety of topics, such as applying for jobs, job leads, housing, transportation, shopping, budgeting, and general adjustment to the community and to the world of work. These organizations do not directly engage in placement activities, but they do offer important transitional and ancillary support to placement activities of centers and placement contractors.

Although centers, placement contractors, and the two national support service contractors are all involved in providing overlapping post-termination services to former Job Corps students, it appears that there is little communication or coordination between these organizations. For example, in our discussions with placement contractor managers, student support services was one of the areas identified for improvement, and the managers had little knowledge of the specific services WICS and JACS provide. Several placement managers indicated that to ensure the job readiness of youth, Job Corps needed to provide additional transitional support services to address the barriers they face after leaving a center. Transportation assistance was considered to be by far the most important support service needed. Staff representing rural areas were especially concerned with transportation issues, because reliable public transportation was often not available. Other major employment

barriers that managers identified as needing increased support and transitional services include lack of child care and affordable housing.

Finally, in addition to the counseling and transition support that JACS gives students before and after termination from Job Corps, for the past few years, JACS staff in Kansas City have been performing post-program data collection. Specifically, beginning in September 1995, JACS has been administering a computer-assisted telephone interviewing operation to collect data from students 13 weeks after they were placed. The purpose of the 13-week follow-up survey is to collect information to verify the initial placement, as well as additional data on students' post-program employment and schooling experiences. In an effort to improve services, the survey obtains information on student satisfaction; it also identifies students who are eligible for--and interested in--receiving additional placement services. The information this survey collected was not available for inclusion in this report, but this source will provide Job Corps with valuable, ongoing information regarding the types of placement services students receive and their satisfaction with them and could identify areas where student needs are not being met.

D. SUMMARY

Two broad findings emerge from our discussions with Job Corps center staff, placement managers, regional WICS and JACS representatives, and regional office staff about the placement services Job Corps provides. First, there is a great deal of overlap in the types of services, and this duplication is increasing as placement outcomes become more important in the performance measurement system. Second, for the most part, the post-termination services that placement contractors offer are limited in scope and substance and often consist of informal, unstructured, or self-help services. Several factors explain these two findings, and the staff we interviewed had several suggestions for improvement.

Centers have historically provided a wide range of job search assistance and career counseling services to students while they are still enrolled at the center, including interviewing skills, resume preparation, instruction in how to fill out employment applications, and methods for locating job openings. All these placement assistance services overlap with the services that contractors reported providing to former students. However, centers have long recognized that they are in a much better position to provide these services while students are still enrolled in the program, because the center can interact with them on a personal basis, whereas placement contractors generally interact with students over the telephone, which clearly limits their ability to provide these services effectively. Recognition of this by placement contractors as well may explain why the managers we interviewed did not stress these activities as the essential elements of the services they provide former students.

The activity identified by placement contract managers as the key service they provide former students, namely direct job placements, is also now being taken on by centers more extensively in response to changes in the outcome measurement system. As described above, centers are now including placement outcomes in performance evaluations of individual staff members, particularly vocational instructors, and this has motivated their staff to become more involved in providing direct placement services. For example, vocational instructors are now devoting more effort to using their linkages with employers and labor organizations, both in the area surrounding the center and in other places where students locate, to help find jobs for their current and former students. These activities directly overlap with the job development services provided by placement contractors, although the efforts of the center staff may supplement rather than substitute for the activities of the placement contractors.

The limited scope and substance of the services of placement contractors can be attributed primarily to three factors. First, the substantial amount of time that managers indicated that their

staff spend on finding students to encourage them to take advantage of the services and on performing the required followup greatly limits these services. All the managers we interviewed indicated that staff spent too much time fulfilling the contact requirements of the program, leaving too little time for helping those who could really benefit. In addition, managers also believed that the time spent contacting students might be best used to develop more linkages with employers, which managers viewed as the most effective for placement.

Second, the geographic dispersion of students prevents placement contractors from providing services on a personal basis. While placement contractors tended to have offices in larger cities, when students leave the program, they locate across vast areas, including rural areas and small towns hundreds of miles from the nearest placement office. Clearly, it would be infeasible for placement contractors to provide services to this geographically dispersed population of students except through telephone contact or written communications. For example, one manager estimated that staff dealt exclusively by telephone or mail with more than 60 percent of their assigned students. This geographic separation makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to provide some types of services, and having to communicate by telephone clearly limits the ability of placement staff to provide in-depth services to students.

Finally, the third factor that limits the scope and substance of the services provided by placement contractors relates to the duplication of services. For instance, as noted earlier, centers provide students instruction in job search skills and help them prepare a resume. As a result, although all placement contractors offer these services, they do not focus on them and offer these services only through informal mechanisms, such as in the course of their required contact with students.

Job Corps could improve its placement services in several areas. Two that were widely viewed as important were (1) the integration and coordination of placement services among centers and

placement contractors, and (2) the initiation and maintenance of linkages with employers. Better integration and coordination among centers and placement contractors in the types of services they provide would certainly help. For example, clearly articulating and assigning responsibility to centers for instructing students in job search skills and ensuring they have a high-quality resume would allow placement contractors to focus more on job development and direct placement of students. Similarly, more frequent and improved communications between vocational instructors and placement specialists was also identified as an area that could greatly improve placement outcomes for students. Several managers we interviewed suggested that vocational instructors could assist placement staff in not only identifying specific job openings, but also in establishing and maintaining linkages with employers. These managers believe that such linkages would give the placement contractors firsthand knowledge of job openings and make the continual involvement of vocational instructors unnecessary.

Other areas that could be improved through a number of policy changes relate to program requirements regarding contacting and serving all former students, provision of support services, better matches between training offerings and jobs in high-demand occupations, and improved automation of and access to existing electronic job search services. Placement contractor staff spend extensive time locating and contacting students who either do not want assistance in finding a job or who do not have the motivation or skills to get and keep a job. Current policies require placement contractors to serve virtually all students who terminate from the program, including those who participated for a very limited time and who have not received any significant program services. Managers contend that if the time devoted to locating and providing services to these students (who generally either do not want assistance or are not motivated to find a job) could be focused on job development and direct placement efforts to assist program completers or former students who are

motivated to work, these students would be much better served and their placement outcomes would greatly improve.

One of the areas cited by the managers of placement contracts as needing additional attention in the Job Corps model was the provision of support services to former students to assist them not only in obtaining a job, but in maintaining employment. The three specific needs identified are transportation, child care, and affordable housing. Although WICS and JACS provide referrals to local community service providers in these areas, managers believed that these providers were currently overwhelmed with requests for assistance. These same support services are also at the forefront of welfare-to-work issues, and it is possible that both Job Corps and local welfare-to-work providers could benefit from coordinating delivery of these support services.

Another area placement managers believe should be more carefully examined is the match between the skills being taught in Job Corps and those needed in the labor market. As described in Chapter IV, there is a potential discordance between some of the vocational offerings in Job Corps and the number of job openings in related occupations. Managers contended that focusing training in the occupational areas that are in high demand could improve the placement outcomes of students. In addition, because of feedback they had received from employers, several managers questioned whether the curricula used in some of the vocational programs were up to current industry standards. Improvements in both of these areas were identified as ways to increase the placement outcomes of students, particularly training-related placements.

Finally, improvements in electronic access to job placement resources was the other major area where placement managers believed Job Corps could enhance their delivery of services. Specifically, providing on-line access in all placement offices to electronic labor market information sources, such as America's Job Bank and other electronic job data banks, was viewed as a useful way for placement specialists to help match former students with job openings.